Media Relations

The previous sections of this toolkit have mentioned a variety of tools you can use to conduct outreach for increasing participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This section provides the specific, practical information you need to put these tools to use:

- Interviews
- Pitch scripts and letters
- Media advisories
- Press releases
- Optimized press releases
- Proclamations
- Calendar listings

At the end of the chapter you will find templates and a list of glossary terms relevant to this chapter.

Tips For Successful Interviews

Following are interview tips that you or your organization's SNAP spokespeople can use.

Before The Interview

- Know the reporter, publication/program, interview format, and audience. Go online and look up recent articles written by the reporter and ask your colleagues if they know anything about the outlet or reporter.
- Know your goal for the interview. For instance, do you want to publicize a prescreening event? Let people know about your toll-free number?
- Know what you want to say. Review the talking points in the Introduction section.
- Develop 3-5 key talking points to ensure your message is related.
- Jot down likely questions and appropriate answers.

Telephone Interviews

- Buy preparation time by asking to call the reporter back if the deadline allows.
- Establish an "interview atmosphere" and mindset. Set yourself up in a quiet room with no distractions and have your talking points in front of you. Do not think it's any less formal because it is over the phone.
- Use notes.
- For radio, speak visually — use words to paint pictures. For instance: "The number of hungry people in Pleasantville could fill the football stadium three times over."

Television Interviews

- For men, a dark suit and blue shirt works best. For women, avoid solid black or white, and busy patterns. Bright colors are fine.
- Sit erect, but not stiff, and slightly forward in the chair.
- Resist the urge to shout into the microphone. Speak and gesture naturally.
- Talk to the reporter or interviewer, not the camera.
- Keep a pleasant expression; smile when appropriate.
- Hold your "interview attitude" from the moment you are lit until the interview is completely over and you are sure the camera is off.

Interview Do's

- Asked about a problem? Talk about a solution. For examples, see the Q&A document in the Introduction section.

- Answer the question you wish they had asked. "Bridge" to a related point you want to make. For example:

  Q: Why are so many people going hungry?

  A: It's a complicated issue, but the important thing is that people can get the nutrition support they need through SNAP benefits.

- Speak in headlines. Speak in short, succinct statements that will make good quotes. Offer a conclusion first, briefly and directly, and back it with facts or proof points. For example:

  "SNAP has made big changes recently that make it easier to find out about the program. You can call 1-800-221-5689 to learn more about benefits and how to apply."

- Speak clearly. Avoid jargon and bureaucratese.

- Be engaging, likable.

- Even if a reporter uses a negative statement or slurs, frame your reply as a positive statement.

Interview Don'ts

- Do not fake your expertise. If you do not have the answer to a question, assure the reporter you will find and provide the needed facts in a timely manner (please provide an approximate time to expect the call), or offer to assist the reporter in finding another source.

- Do not overlap the interviewer's question; begin your answer when the reporter is finished.

- Do not be provoked. Keep cool.

- Do not lie to a reporter. If you are uncomfortable responding to a particular question, simply say that you have "no comment." However, if you can, refer them to another appropriate source for the information or let them know you will find out for them.

- Do not over-answer. Short answers are better than long.

- Do not let false charges, facts, or figures offered by a reporter stand uncorrected, for example:

  Q: Why would someone go to the trouble of applying for SNAP if the benefits are only $10 a month?

  A: On average, monthly benefits vary from $86 per person to almost $200 per household. This additional support will help low-income households purchase nutritious foods necessary for a healthy diet.

- Do not fall victim to hypothetical situations and "A or B" dilemmas.

Media Pitch Script

What is a pitch script?

A pitch script is an outline of the key points you need to cover during a phone conversation with a reporter or assignment editor. You can use this pitch script to talk to a reporter before or after sending them a media advisory about an upcoming event.

How much time will I have to make my pitch?

Often you only have 30 - 90 seconds to make your pitch, so you must use them wisely. Practice your pitch aloud once or twice before calling.

Should I read from my script?

No, do not read directly from the script as you talk. The script is to be used as a guide.

Where can I find SNAP participation data to use in my pitch?

You can find updated participation data on the FNS Web site at www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/SNAP/participation.htm.

What if the reporter cannot attend?

If the reporter cannot attend, ask if you can send a photograph or perhaps arrange a phone interview with one of your spokespeople afterwards.

Pitch Script Template

Following are two examples of pitch scripts. The ineffective script does not provide the reporter with enough details to cover the event and does not present a case. The effective script politely asks if the reporter has time to talk and efficiently outlines pertinent event information.

Effective:

"Hello, my name is XX and I am calling from the Hunger Organization. Is this a good time?" [*Or, "Do you have a minute?" If not, ask when you can call back.*]

"Because XX low-income elderly people in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY] are living on the edge of hunger, Hunger Organization is kicking off a 'Benefit Bus' tour on Monday to help the older population in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY] access SNAP benefits without the bother of finding transportation to a local SNAP office.

"This bus tour will span X days and X locations. [Have additional details handy, such as a media advisory, in case you are asked questions about the event.] SNAP outreach coordinators will be on hand to provide a checklist of all necessary paperwork needed to apply, and to conduct prescreenings for benefit eligibility.

"I hope you'll agree that this is something you or your station/paper would be interested in covering. May I fax or e-mail you a media advisory? [*Or, I have faxed/e-mailed you a media advisory about this event to provide you with additional information.*]"If you have any questions about the event or our program, or need to reach us, my name is XX and my number is XXX-XXXX." [*For voicemail, repeat name and number.*]

Ineffective:

"Hi! I just wanted to tell you that Hunger Organization will be holding an event on Monday. The antihunger group works with members of the community to provide SNAP benefits and…"

Pitch Letter

What is a pitch and what are some examples of a pitch?

A pitch is contact with a journalist or editor to introduce story ideas or other salient information. "Pitching" most often refers to media outreach efforts to obtain coverage; however, outreach efforts to place PSAs or secure partnerships are also forms of pitches.

When to Use a Pitch Letter

A pitch letter makes the case for covering a specific story, especially a story that is "evergreen" or is not tied to a specific event and can be written at any time.

The Importance of a Pitch Letter

More than a phone call, the pitch letter allows you to outline what you are doing and why it is valuable. A good pitch letter has staying power. If it doesn't generate a story today, it may tomorrow.

The Format of a Pitch Letter

A pitch letter can be used in a variety of formats — mail, fax, email. If you choose to send a pitch letter via mail, put it on your letterhead. The points outlined in the "Developing and Selling the Story" section of this toolkit will also come in handy as you create your pitch letter.

A template of a pitch letter is included at the end of this chapter.

Pitch Letter Template

Dear [NAME OF REPORTER],

Have you ever had to decide whether to buy medicine for your sick child or buy food? Have you ever had to choose between paying the heating bill and having enough food for dinner? Every day, thousands of low-income people in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY] grapple with issues like these. But they don't have to.

There are XX people living on the edge of hunger in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY]. SNAP helps low-income Americans purchase nutritious, healthy food. However, only half of those eligible to receive SNAP benefits are currently enrolled.

[ORGANIZATION NAME] is kicking off a SNAP outreach effort in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY] by *[Describe the activity you would like the media to report on, such as hosting a health fair or prescreening event, volunteering, distributing informational fliers, promoting events, etc., And be sure to use language to get their attention]*. The goal of this outreach effort is to ensure that everyone who is eligible for SNAP knows about it and is able to access benefits.

SNAP is a win-win for low-income families and individuals, as well as for the local economy. By helping them defray the costs of groceries, SNAP benefits allow recipients to purchase more healthy and nutritious food. These benefits also help local retailers and the local community by bringing Federal dollars into the area.

Given some of your recent stories, I thought you would be interested in learning more about our community outreach effort, and I look forward to speaking with you in further detail. I can be reached at (XXX) XXX-XXXX to answer any questions you may have or provide you with background information.

Best regards,

[YOUR NAME]
[TITLE]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]

Media Advisories

What is a media advisory?

A media advisory is a one-page document loaded with information about the who, what, when and where of your planned event — without giving away the entire story.

What goes out first, the media advisory or the press release?

The media advisory is sent in advance of a press release.

What is the goal of a media advisory?

The goal is to get your event on the media's calendars and planning books. Using your organization's letterhead, write your advisory in a way that will interest the press, without giving away so many details that they get the full story without having to attend the event.

How do I write a media advisory?

As demonstrated in the template below, begin with a headline that informs the media that something important or "newsworthy" is happening, followed by a secondary heading with additional facts.

When should I distribute the media advisory?

See the Media Outreach section for more information on when to distribute a media advisory.

What Type of Information Should I Include in the Advisory?

- **WHAT** As in a press release, the first sentence should describe the purpose or "what" of your event in a uniquely newsworthy way. Like your pitch, the media advisory should have a "hook" or angle to get the attention of the media.

- **WHEN** The "when" section outlines the specific date and time of the event.

- **WHO** The "who" section lists event attendees in order of prestige — for example, a State official would be featured before a local official.

- **WHERE** The "where" states the exact address of the event, and includes directions and parking information if necessary.

- **WHY** The "why" section provides background information for the media, including relevant statistics and a brief description of your organization. This section should also reference other resources, if available, such as a Web site, video clips or radio sound bites.

Media Advisory Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   CONTACT: [NAME OF DESIGNATED MEDIA CONTACT]
                                                          [(AREA CODE) PHONE #]
                                                          [CELL# or E-MAIL]

[TITLE OF STORY]
[Subhead to identify story line]

WHAT: [Explain the media event. Ex: What income does a family in (local area) need to meet basic needs? What types of subsidies and supports are in place to help (local area) families make ends meet? What is being done to help lift the earnings of low-income working families in (local area)?

These are the kinds of questions that will be answered at a briefing to release a report on the cost of living in (local or State name) and to kick off a campaign to help local area) families on their path to economic security.)]

[BULLET LIST OF KEY POINTS]

WHEN: [DATE & TIME]

WHERE: [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]
[STREET ADDRESS]
[CITY, STATE]
[PHONE]

WHO: [NAME, TITLE & ORGANIZATION]
[NAME, TITLE & ORGANIZATION]
[NAME, TITLE & ORGANIZATION]
[NAME, TITLE & ORGANIZATION]

Sponsors of the event are: [LIST ORGANIZATIONAL OR PRIVATE SPONSORS]

How to Write a Press Release

Tip 1   **THE HEADLINE** The headline of your press release should be as dramatic as possible without sounding exaggerated. Will your program affect the community in a big way? Think about what will grab the attention of a news reporter. Your headline will tell the news.

Tip 2   **WRITING STYLE** The upside-down pyramid is a standard style of news writing. The broad base at the top of the pyramid represents the most newsworthy information in the story, and the narrow tip at the bottom represents the least newsworthy information in the story. This enables the story to be shortened by cutting from the bottom without losing the most important details. Similarly, when you write a press release in the upside-down pyramid format, you put the most newsworthy information at the beginning and the least newsworthy information at the end.

Tip 3   **PARAGRAPH ONE** The first paragraph states the news or announcement and includes supporting information. Make sure you have addressed the who, what, when, where, and why of the story.

Tip 4   **PARAGRAPH TWO** A quote often starts the second paragraph and delivers a major message point of your effort. It can state an opinion and add a human element to the story. Generally, the person writing the release will draft a quote to effectively communicate the point.

Tip 5   **USE OF QUOTES** Quotes must be approved by the person to whom the quote is attributed. Quotes are often adjusted to respond to that person's concerns, tone, and style. Be sure to make the quotes conversational and brief; this increases their chances of being picked up and repeated. You should not quote more than two people. Quoting from too many sources causes confusion.

Tip 6   **PARAGRAPH THREE** This paragraph contains more information on the event or announcement. You could include interesting and relevant facts that are a part of your main message. You can amplify your message with another quote either from the same spokesperson or from a different source. Be sure the quotes are conversational and brief.

Tip 7   **LAST PARAGRAPH** This paragraph should tell the public what you want them to know about your organization. For example, how long it has been in the community and/or how people can contact you.

Tip 8   **LOCAL OR REGIONAL MEDIA** You will be writing for local or regional media, so your press release should provide details about how the news affects your community. Your local news outlets will be more interested in a story whose impact is felt locally. That said, you should also provide some national context — like information about SNAP benefits, trends, and national studies.

How to Write a Press Release

Tip 9   **ACRONYMS, JARGON, AND TECHNICAL LANGUAGE** Do not use acronyms, jargon or highly technical language in your press release.

Tip 10   **LENGTH OF PRESS RELEASE** Your press release should be to-the-point and a maximum of one to two pages. Few reporters will read beyond a second page. A press release is not the right forum to issue thank-you's and acknowledgements.

Tip 11   **PROOFREAD YOUR RELEASE** Always make time to review and edit your release. Correct all spelling and typographical errors. Have someone unfamiliar with the program look over the release to see if the messages are clear to them.

Tip 12   **LETTERHEAD** Print the release on your organization's letterhead so that it looks official.

Press Release Layout Suggestions

1.   **CONTACT INFORMATION** Always include up-to-date contact information on your press release in the upper right-hand corner. The contacts you list should be easily accessible; you may wish to include more than one person. Because reporters often work on tight deadlines and may need to reach your contact immediately, consider including a cell phone number on your release.

2.   **PARAGRAPH ONE** The first paragraph of your press release should include the city from which you are releasing the information and the date.

3.   **SPACING** To ensure ease of reading, use at least a space and a half or double space between lines. Make sure you leave enough margin space, at least 3/4 ", for reporters to make their own notes.

4.   **FORMAT** If your press release is more than a page, you should write "- more -" at the bottom of the page to indicate that it continues. You should also write "Page Two" in the upper left-hand corner of the page so that reporters can follow the release easily. Finish the release by inserting "###" at the end. This indicates that there is no more copy.

An annotated template of a press release is included at the end of this chapter.

Press Release Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
[DATE]

CONTACT: **1**
[YOUR NAME OR APPROPRIATE CONTACT]
[(AREA CODE) PHONE #]
[CELL# or E-MAIL]

[HUNGER ORGANIZATION] AND [CITY GROCER]
KICK OFF "FILL THE CART" CAMPAIGN

Outreach Effort Underway to Educate [YOUR COMMUNITY] Low-Income Families and Individuals about Nutrition and SNAP Purchase Power

2 **[YOUR CITY, STATE, DATE]** – [HUNGER ORGANIZATION] and [CITY GROCER] kicked off the "Fill the Cart" campaign today – a major outreach initiative to increase enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Working together, the two will educate [YOUR COMMUNITY'S] low-income families and individuals about nutritious and healthy food which can be purchased using SNAP benefits. [CITY GROCER] has also developed a recipe book highlighting sample healthy menus and an easy-to-use shopping list featuring nutritious items that can be purchased using SNAP benefits. The recipe book will be distributed at local [CITY GROCER] stores, farmers markets and health fairs. *[Add specific details about outreach effort]*

"[INSERT QUOTE HERE]," said [YOUR ORGANIZATION'S] Executive Director, president or spokesperson.

3 SNAP is a win-win for the [CITY] community – for both residents and retailers. Funded with Federal dollars, each $5 in new SNAP benefits generates almost twice that amount in economic activity for the community. For a household of four, the average benefit is about $200 a month. Research shows that low-income households participating in SNAP have access to more food energy, protein, and an array of essential vitamins and minerals in their home food supply. *[Add other relevant information on the event of announcement – i.E. Interesting/relevant statistics, economic benefit, EBT card versus paper coupons.]*

"[INSERT SECOND QUOTE HERE]," said [SNAP office contact, partner, or another key community leader.]

[NAME OF ORGANIZATION] is community-based organization serving the [NAME OF AREA] community for 25 years. [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] raises awareness about the nutrition benefits of SNAP through outreach including prescreening events, cooking demonstrations and a toll-free information hotline. For more information about SNAP, and what you can do in [NAME OF CITY/TOWN] to help further [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]'s mission, call [PHONE NUMBER OF ORGANIZATION] or visit [YOUR Web site, if applicable].

4 ###

What is an optimized press release?

An optimized press release is similar to a traditional release. It contains news-worthy and buzz-worthy information that you want to convey to your audience. It includes a strong and catchy headline, a summary, and an introductory paragraph. Like a traditional press release, you can also include quotes and references.

Unlike a traditional release, optimized releases can include hyperlinks, images, and videos, and are often edited to include "keywords" to help search engines find and index the releases.

The purpose of this section is to teach you how to take your traditional press release and transform it into an optimized release and then distribute it online.

DEFINITION

Optimized Press Release	=	Traditional Press Release + Keyword Research + Hyperlinks + Online Distribution

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Why is it important to optimize releases and distribute them online?

The Internet is growing. More and more, people are getting their news online. Almost 40 percent of people get their news online on a regular basis, compared to 13 percent 10 years ago. That means that if you want people to find your news, you should make sure it is online.

Optimizing your release will help to make sure that people who are looking online for your news can find it.

How do I start?

In the following pages, we will discuss several basic steps you can take to optimize a press release. We also provide an example. Should you wish to explore these steps in more depth, we encourage you to read this information and then review the quick tutorial that follows, which will shed even more light for you on the subject of optimized press releases and what is entailed in order to perform each step.

Tips & Tools

- Looking to get more information about any of these topics? Refer to the Tutorial section later in this chapter.

- If you need help with a specific word, check the Glossary at the end of this chapter.

How to Develop an Optimized Press Release

Step 1 Use Keyword Research

Think of keyword research as "the psychology of search." When Internet users search for information using search engines, they are asking for specific information. Therefore, you want to use "key" language in your press release.

For instance, if you are writing about conjunctivitis, but everyone is searching online for "pink eye," they may never find your information—even if it is exactly what they want.

FNS has developed some keywords that pertain to SNAP. They are available for you to use here.

You may want to build on this work by doing your own research. Performing keyword research lets you learn the words and phrases that online searchers use most often to look for your subject matter. Visit the Tutorial section to learn how to conduct your own keyword research and to obtain a list of online tools you can use.

Step 2 Modify For Online Audience

After you compile key research terms used by your Internet audience, you can identify the ideal wording to use in your release. You should insert this word or phrase into your release as much as possible.

While you want to insert your one keyword or key phrase as often as possible, there are a few areas that are more important than others when optimizing a release. These are the areas that the search engine sees as more important and uses to determine what your release is about. The key areas are:

- Headline
- Summary or subhead
- First paragraph (or first 250 words)
- Hyperlinks (covered indepth later in this section)

Tips & Tools

You want to include your keyword or key phrase about 5 times for every 100 words — but in real terms that is very hard to do. It is always more important to make sure your release reads well.

Step 3 Insert Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks should be placed where you think your reader would want more information. Often, it makes sense to hyperlink the name of your organization to your Web site the first time your organization's name appears in the release. Other than that, the placement is up to you. It is better to concentrate the bulk of your URLs towards the beginning of the release.

Internet users expect that you will include hyperlinks in your release, but you should also spell out the Web address of your main site, in case someone prints your release. One place you can include the full Web site address is at the end of your release or in your organization's boilerplate.

Step 4 Select An Online Service

You will need to choose an online service to distribute your release. There are many online vendors that can distribute your release, with different features and different prices. Therefore, you should choose the service that fits your budget and also meets your distribution needs. Some services are much more expensive, but will distribute your release to traditional wire services and online channels, such as Yahoo! News. Other options are free, but do not distribute your release to anyone. Instead, these services rely on you to send the release URL to your media and other contacts.

Some Optimized Release Distribution Options

- PRWeb www.prweb.com

- MultiVu www.multivu.com

- EON eon.businesswire.com/portal/site/eon

- PitchEngine www.pitchengine.com

- MarketWire www.marketwire.com

For additional recommendations on how to evaluate the relative success of your release, please see the Tutorial section.

Tips & Tools

- Don't use too many URLs in one sentence or short paragraph — it can make your text difficult to read and be distracting.

- You should use no more than 1 hyperlink per 100 words of your release. So, if your release is 525 words long, you should include no more than 5 hyperlinks.

Step 5 Measure Your Success

Unlike traditional wire services, most online distribution services will not provide you with a pick-up or coverage report. However, many online distribution services will provide the number of people who read or download the release directly from their Web site.

For additional recommendations on how to evaluate the relative success of your release, please see the Tutorial section.

Optimizing A Release: Example

In this section, you can see how an actual traditional release was optimized and then distributed online. In this example certain vendors and products were used, but for your release some tools may be more applicable and appropriate than others.

The above example of a traditional release might look familiar to you. When you begin to work towards distributing an online release, the first step is to review your traditional release and identify the key subject areas. You should also compile a list of what you think people who are looking for this type of information would type into an Internet search engine.

For the above example, some of the key concepts and ideas were: food stamps, SNAP, USDA, FNS, food, nutrition, Farm Bill, food assistance, EBT, etc.

Conducting Keyword Research

Next, using an online keyword research tool (for this example Keyword Discovery is used), look up all the concepts you thought of in step one. Keep track of how the terms compare to each other. For instance, in the previous example, we found that "apply for food stamps" is used almost three times more often than "applying for food stamps."

Your goal is to come up with one phrase or word that is the central subject matter of your release, and which is the most searched-for way of describing that subject. So, if the release were all about applying for food stamps, your key phrase would be "apply for food stamps."

In what follows, you can see how often some terms are searched for compared to other terms. "Nutrition," "USDA," and "food stamps" are the top three.

"Nutrition" is searched for the most of all the terms. However, people who type "nutrition" into a search engine could be searching for a variety of things. Try typing "nutrition" into Google – the top results are nutritional guides filled with calorie information and healthy eating tips. It will not hurt to include the word "nutrition" in the release, but it should not be the main keyword, especially because "USDA" and "food stamps" are really much more relevant to this particular release.

Looking at the traditional release, you should find places in the key areas (headline, summary, and first paragraph) to insert these words. Remember, keeping your release readable and interesting is always the priority.

Insert Hyperlinks

We stressed earlier how important it is to include hyperlinks in a release. The next step is to decide where you want the hyperlink to go.

For the press release on the next page, the choices were fairly obvious. The release is about the name change of the Food Stamp Program to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), so you want to drive people to the landing page for that program. Secondly, we wanted to link to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service homepage so people can also learn more broadly about the available programs.

Ideally, you should insert your hyperlinks into the body of your press release and ensure that the text in the hyperlink includes some of your keywords. It is also a good idea to include hyperlinks early in your release both for the benefit of search engines and also so that people will see the links even if they do not scroll through your entire release.

Tips & Tools

- Spelling out acronyms is always a good idea. In this case, many people are not yet familiar with the new Federal Food Stamp Program name–the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The full name of SNAP also happens to include "Nutrition," which is a very highly searched for word.

- In the case of SNAP, it is also helpful to use "food stamps" somewhere in your release because "food stamps" is still very much in people's minds and is very likely to be searched for. Over time, as SNAP becomes more familiar to the public, this may change.

- In general, for online releases, your headline should be about 22 words, your summary or subhead should be about 2 sentences, and your release should be about 1,000 words. These lengths are ideal for search engines, and also reflect online consumers' short attention span.

Add Assets and Tag Your Release

One of the most notable features of online optimized press releases is that they can include logos, images, attached files, and video. It is always a good idea to include at least one image or logo if you can—it will make your release stand out more in the search engine results.
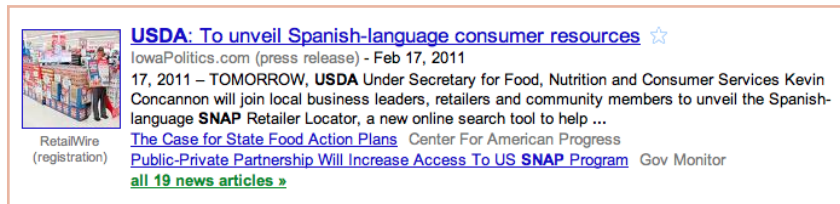
*Images displayed alongside news results on a search engine results page*

In addition to making your release stand out more in search engine results, adding assets to your release increases the depth of your offering—you have turned your press release into a complete package.

Depending on the vendor you choose to use, you may also be given the option to add "tags" or a "list of keywords" to your release. These are mechanisms to help people find and share your release. Use words from your keyword research for these fields.

Review the Final Product and Distribute

Of course you always want to review a release before you distribute it— as it is better to be safe than sorry. With some online release vendors, you can update the version of the release that resides on the vendor's site, but you can't update what has already been distributed to the media or any of the service's subscribers.

Following is a screen shot of what the optimized version of the SNAP release looked like when it was distributed online.
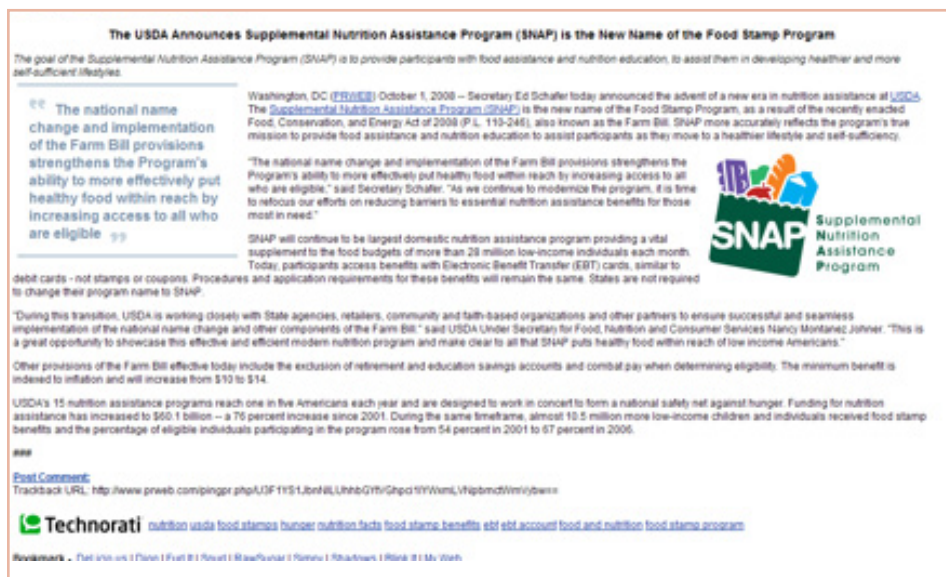
Tutorial: Optimized Press Releases

What are some differences between the optimized and traditional press releases?

An optimized release is often shorter than a traditional release. The optimized release has been adapted for Internet use and is easier to find by search engines. The optimized releases are written to include key search words. These key search words are words used by your audiences.

An optimized release often includes video, images, and other documents such as research papers or presentations.

Lastly, an optimized release is typically distributed by online press release distribution services, rather than by you. These services specifically target online media channels, such as Google News, Yahoo! News, and other news outlets.

What are some benefits to using an optimized press release?

Benefits include your ability to:

- Distribute your news directly to consumers in addition to media
- Use hyperlinks that will drive people to your Web site
- Use video, photos, or logos
- Enable audiences to download materials
- Take advantage of tools such as "social bookmarking" and "tagging" to allow people to easily share your news with others
- Increase traffic (Internet visitors) to your Web site
- Drive your audience to a particular location on the Internet (a specific page, for example)
- Increase the online visibility and awareness of your organization or event
- Raise the visibility of your Web page on search engine results pages

My traditional press releases already show up online, so why should I optimize a release?

People who are getting their news online use search engines. The majority of online searches are done through Google. There are other popular search engines as well, including Yahoo! and MSN.

Search engines are important because you want your news to be easily found and indexed. Search engine optimization (often referred to as "SEO") is the process that helps organize the information on a Web page to make it most easily found and recorded by search engines. Optimizing your release for search engines will make sure your information is getting to the people who are searching for it.

When I search for something using a search engine, different results appear in different areas of the page. What are the different sections, and what do they mean?

You often see two types of results when you search for something using an Internet search engine like Google. One result is called "Paid Search" or "Sponsored Links." These are often on the right side of the screen, but can also appear at the top or bottom. Regardless of where they appear, they will always be labeled as "Sponsored Links" or highlighted with different colors. Think of these as advertisements. Someone is paying money to display an ad to people who search for particular content online. This can be a very powerful tool, but not one covered in this toolkit.
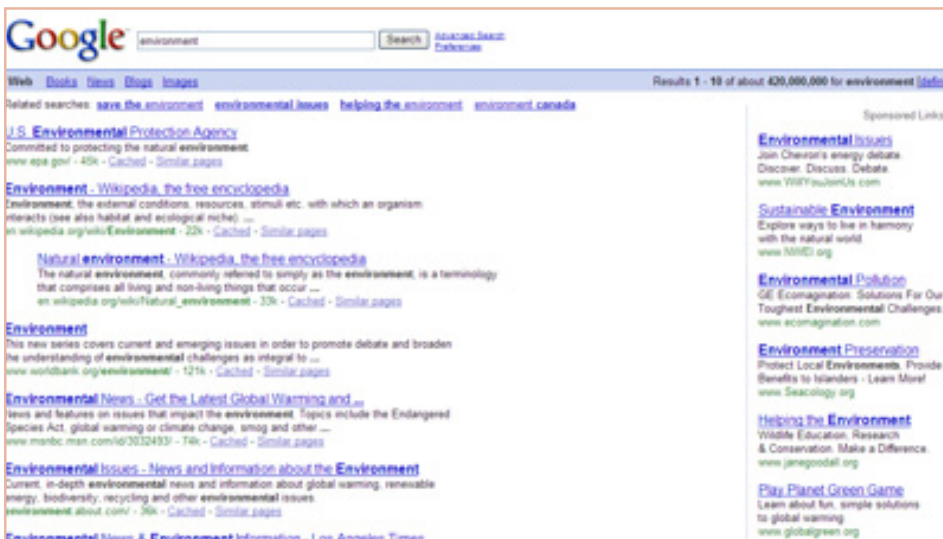
The other type of result is called "Natural Search Results" or "Organic Search Results." These results are ranked by the search engines based on a variety of factors and cannot be bought. The closer to the top of the list a result or "hit" is, the more relevant and valuable the result is to the string of words you used to search by. The goal of search engine optimization is to get your information at or near the top of the list.

Keyword Research

FNS has provided a basic list of relevant keyword research results, but you may wish or need to supplement these results with additional research of your own. To do so, follow the steps below:

1. Decide what the main subject areas are in your release.

2. Think of other ways to say those same ideas and make a list.

3. Using an online tool (see options in the sidebar), look up each word or phrase on your list.

4. Keep track of how often each term is searched for. Organize your list from most-searched-for to least-searched-for.

5. Choose the keywords that are both descriptive of your content and most popular according to the keyword research tools.

Why do I need to use a tool to tell me which words to use?

The way people search for information online is not always intuitive. For instance, "applying for food stamps," "food stamp application," and "apply for food stamps" are three phrases with almost identical meanings. In any traditional press release, you might use all three interchangeably.

However, keyword data from an online tool will tell you that "apply for food stamps" is used almost three times more often than "applying for food stamps."

Online Resources

Free Online Keyword Research Tools
Keyword Discovery
http://keyworddiscovery.com/search.html

Google Keyword Tool
https://adwords.google.com/select/ KeywordToolExternal

Word Tracker
http://www.wordtracker.com/

Query: food stamps

Results 1 - 100 of 5964   Page: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Search Term	Total
food stamps	6225
apply for food stamps	612
florida food stamps	514
food stamps application	248
texas food stamps	238
applying for food stamps	223
food stamps florida	211
indiana food stamps	204
texas department of human services food stamps	193
apply for food stamps online	180
emergency food stamps	145
how to apply for food stamps	144
food stamps eligibility	125
application for food stamps	122
alabama food stamps	116
michigan food stamps	88
ebt food stamps	83
access florida food stamps	80
louisiana food stamps	78
how to get food stamps	75
california food stamps	74

The numbers in the "Total" column represent how often the term was searched for from a 10-percent sample of search engines over the last 12 months. Use the numbers to choose one term over another, but do not get hung up on the numbers themselves.

Hyperlinks

What is a hyperlink?

A hyperlink is a word, phrase, or image that you can click on to jump to a new document or a new section within the current document. Hyperlinks are found in nearly all Web pages, and let you click from page to page. Text hyperlinks are often blue and underlined, but don't have to be. Hyperlinks are often called just "links."

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> Clicking here will take you to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service home page is an example of a hyperlink. Clicking on the red text, or "hypertext," will take you to a destination URL, in this case http://www.fns.usda.gov.

Why should I include hyperlinks in my online press release?

It is critical to include hyperlinks in your online release. Not doing so is a huge missed opportunity. Hyperlinks are important because they:

- Lead readers of your release to your Web site; and
- Count as objective votes for your Web site in the eyes of search engines.

Leading readers of your release to your Web site is important if you want to increase traffic to your site, where they can gather more information and ideally become repeat visitors, as they learn to view your site as an authority.

The second point is equally important to accomplishing the goals of an optimized release. As your press release is picked up by other Web sites, the release will include the hyperlinks you've inserted. Search engines look at these hyperlinks very favorably, and having many hyperlinks pointing to your site helps your site rank higher in search engines.

Choosing a Service

There are many services that will distribute your release online at various price levels. These companies also have customer service representatives who can help you determine which service is right for you and answer any questions you might have. Here are some additional factors you should consider when choosing a service to use.

Things To Consider

1. **BILINGUAL OR LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH** Not all vendors offer the same services. Some have very sophisticated translation and targeting options, while others have no distribution for languages other than English, although they will post the release on their site. Make sure to ask questions before selecting your service if other languages are a consideration.

2. **USE OF IMAGES, VIDEO, OR LOGOS** Most optimized release vendors let you include images and logos. Most will also let you include video—some simply require that the video is hosted on YouTube.com, while others need the actual video file to be uploaded. If a video is important, check to see which vendors include video in their fees.

3. **MEASUREMENTS** There are different levels of metrics and reporting after your release has been distributed. To learn more about ways you can supplement metrics that your release service provides, see the Measurement section of this tutorial.

4. **EXTRA FEATURES** Many services provide the option to attach downloadable files, "tags," and "social bookmarks." Tags and social bookmarks are Web 2.0 methods to flag what your release is about and make it easy to find and share.

What are the main differences between using a traditional wire service and an online optimized release service?

Where the release is distributed is one big difference—an online release should be more targeted to online news portals, online news search engines, and social media tools. This means that it is targeting the online news consumer and, in many cases, can reach the end user without ever being "picked up" (i.e., sought out by the media) in the traditional sense.

Depending on the service you use, the actual uploading and submission of the release may be different or similar to the experience you are used to from traditional wire services.

Optimized releases are also displayed alongside news stories in many news search engines—allowing you to control the headline, summary, and often the image associated with the search engine result. This control is crucial as more and more people find their news online. Search engine results pages are an increasingly significant opportunity to grab consumers.

Measuring Your Success

Unlike traditional wire services, most online distribution services will not provide you with a pick-up or coverage report. However, many online distribution services will provide the number of people who read or downloaded the release directly from their Web site.

Depending on your goal in distributing your release online, there are different steps you can take to measure how your release performed. Some suggestions are below.

> **GOAL**
>
> Distribute the content of your release to news outlets

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS
As mentioned, unlike traditional wire services you may be familiar with, most online distribution services will not provide you with a pick-up or coverage report. To measure how many online news outlets have picked up your release, try using a search engine to search for the title of your release a few days after it was sent. Two popular search engines that can be used for this include Google (www.google.com) and Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com).

In addition to searching for the title of your release, you can also search for your organization name, the name of the event or speaker you are promoting, and the central topic of your release to see if the content of the release was picked up by an outlet without the full body and title of the release.

> **GOAL**
>
> Distribute the content of your release to partners (in addition to news outlets)

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS
Using a similar process as described above, you can also see how many blogs pick up your release. The term "blog" is short for "weblog," and is a Web site that displays in chronological order the postings by one or more individuals. Blogs can be written by journalists, but are often written by the general public. Some blogs are read by many people, while others are read by fewer people.

You can search for your release using one of the many blog search tools including:

- Google Blog Search http://blogsearch.google.com/
- Technorati http://technorati.com/
- IceRocket http://www.icerocket.com/

Technorati has a system called "Authority" to tell you how important and relevant they have determined different blogs to be. The higher a blog's authority number, the more people are reading and linking to that particular blog.

> ### GOAL
>
> Increase traffic (Internet visitors) to your Web site

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

To determine whether an online release has increased traffic to your Web site, you will need access to the traffic logs of your Web site. The person or organization who administers your Web site should be able to grant you access to these or pull information for you. You can either look for an overall increase in the number of visitors to your site in the time following the distribution of your release, or you can try to dig a bit deeper.

Most Web traffic logs should be able to tell you "Referrers" or "Referrals" to your site. This is a way of finding out where visitors to your site are coming from. If you use ABC Press Releases to distribute your release, the URL of your release will begin with www.ABCPressReleases.com, or a similar standard domain name. This allows you to search for your "Referrers" or "Referrals," which shows how many people came from that domain name, and how many clicked through from your release.

Similarly, if you know your release was picked up by www.BestNewsSource.com, you can search for that domain in your "Referrals" or "Referrers" to find out how many people came to your site from that location.

> ### GOAL
>
> Drive your audience to a particular location on the Internet (a specific page, for example)

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

You can use the same measurements as above, especially if overall traffic to your Web site has increased. If it has, and you included the specific URL you wanted people to visit, then it is likely that people were visiting that page. Most Web analytic programs will also provide you with statistics on the most popular pages on your site, which can also tell you how many people are visiting a particular page.

If the Web page you drove people to included a survey, registration for an event, or downloadable resources, you can also look for an increase in interaction with those features.

GOAL

Increase the online visibility and awareness of your organization, news, or event

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

Search for your release on the major search engines, as well as the portion of their search engines specifically dedicated to news.

You can also search for the keyword or phrase you optimized for in your release. When you type a keyword or phrase into the news searches on the immediate day or so following the distribution of your release, your release should be returned high up on the page.

Think of this as basically a billboard for your organization – even if people don't click through to your release, they have seen your headline and in most cases your subhead or summary, and sometimes even an image or logo.

GOAL

Help increase the position of your Web page on search engine results pages

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

This one takes longer to achieve than the others, but issuing optimized online releases with hyperlinks to your Web site is one very important element of increasing the position of your Web site on the search engine results page.

To illustrate the importance of improving your Web site's position: 80 percent of Internet traffic begins at a search engine, according to Harris Interactive.

Getting your Web site to rank highly in search engines can take a very long time, but is worth the effort. For example, 70 percent of people will click on something on the first results page of a search engine – that is to say, on one of the first 10 results. The numbers drop significantly from there. Approximately 15 percent of people will click on the second page of results 11-20. Finally, people will click on results 21-30 on the third page only about 10 percent of the time.

Search Engine Results	Clicks
Page 1	70%
Page 2	15%
Page 3	10%
Page 4	5%

GOAL

Create a multimedia release that can live online and include video, photos, or downloadable resources

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

This is more straightforward than the others. Did you include video and images in your release or downloadable materials such as white papers or presentations? If so, you have created a multimedia release. With many online optimized release services, you can update the release over time to include new images or a video from an event. This means that you can send the release URL to any contacts you have and they will have instant access to not only the text of your release, but also any additional resources you want to provide to them.

Optimized Press Release Glossary of Terms

Terms	*Definition*
Anchor Text	Anchor text is the part of the hyperlink that you see when you are reading a Web page, email, or document. For instance in the example Food & Nutrition Service Home Page, the words "Food & Nutrition Service Home Page" are the anchor text. Anchor text is analyzed by search engines, so it is important to use relevant keywords in your hyperlinks when possible.
Hyperlink	A hyperlink is a word, phrase, or image that you can click on to jump to a new document or a new section within the current document. Hyperlinks are found in nearly all Web pages, allowing users to click their way from page to page. Text hyperlinks are often blue and underlined, but don't have to be.
Keyword (or Key Phrase)	The one word or key phrase that is the most searched for and represents the central point of your release. You want to find the right term to use for your subject matter, so that people who are searching for relevant information online will find your content.
Keyword Research	Keyword research is the practice of researching keywords (terms) relevant to your Web site or online content and determining which are actually searched upon by search engine users to find information.
Metadata	Broadly, metadata, or meta data, is data about data. In terms of the Web and search engine optimization, metadata is descriptive text that you add to the code of a Web page to help search engines identify and index the content of that page. The three most common types of metadata on a Web page are the Title, the Description and the Keywords. While the keywords and description do not appear on the actual Web page, the Title is what shows up in the top bar of your browser when you are on a Web page, such as Food & Nutrition Service Home Page on http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/. All three areas should include keywords determined through keyword research.
Optimized Press Release	An optimized press release conveys news or information, like a traditional release does, but it also includes language that is optimized for search engines and hyperlinks to Web pages. Optimized releases are also distributed online.
Organic Search	Also referred to as 'Natural Search,' organic search is the opposite of paid search and search engine marketing. Organic search engine results are ranked by the search engines based on a variety of factors and cannot be bought. The closer to the top of the list a result or "hit" is, the more relevant and valuable the result is to the string of words you used to search by. By utilizing search engine optimization, over time, an organization's information can improve its organic search results, and appear at or near the top of the list.
Paid Search	Paid search, or search engine marketing, is basically purchasing ads associated with keywords. This is the opposite of organic search. You will often see paid search ads on the search engine results page along with the organically derived search results.
Search Engine Crawler	A search engine crawler (also known as a Web spider, Web crawler or Web robot) is a program run by search engines that browses the Web in a methodical, automated manner and indexes content for the engine.
Search Engine Marketing	Search engine marketing (SEM) is the practice of paying a search engine to run ads associated with keywords. These are the ads that you see on a search engine results page.
Social Bookmarking	Social bookmarking is a method for Internet users to store, organize, search, and manage bookmarks of Web pages on the Internet with the help of metadata. In a social bookmarking system, users save links to Web pages that they want to remember and/or share.
Technorati Tags	Technorati tags are labels that people use to make it easier to find blog posts, photos, and videos that are related on the popular blog search engine Technorati (www.technorati.com).

Proclamations

Who issues a proclamation?

Proclamations are usually issued by mayors, county commissions, governors, city commissions, State legislatures, and other public officials to recognize a local cause or achievement.

Why and when should an organization request a proclamation?

Organizations can use a proclamation to get more publicity when conducting events or outreach efforts. The timing is best around a major event or when undergoing a big media push.

How is a proclamation issued?

Your organization may submit a proclamation request. You may privately approach a mayor, State legislator, or city commissioner to sponsor your request. Provide draft language that you would like the issuing body to consider. That often helps to move the process forward. If the proclamation is to be issued at a public gathering, such as a city commission meeting, you may need to file the request a month or more in advance, depending on the rules of the issuing body.

What steps should be taken to issue a proclamation?

Once you have determined which public official(s) you would like to ask to issue a proclamation, it will be important to research whether any guidelines exist. This information can often be found on the officials' Web site, or can be obtained by calling a public affairs liaison. In many cases, you can apply for a proclamation by mail, email, or personal delivery.

What does a typical proclamation say?

The language in the proclamation should be crafted to drive home key points about your organization, your special outreach effort, and the value of SNAP. The proclamation template on the next page can provide some helpful language.

What does a typical proclamation look like?

Oftentimes, a proclamation is printed on heavy weight paper and affixed with a seal and official signatures. Your organization can proudly display it.

Proclamation Template

SNAP AWARENESS DAY/WEEK/MONTH
[TIMING TO BE PROCLAIMED]
By the [INSERT TITLE OF LOCAL OR STATE OFFICIAL...Such as Mayor of/Governor] of
[INSERT CITY/TOWN/STATE]

A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the cornerstone of the Federal nutrition assistance safety net, providing more than 8.2 million households and 21 million low-income Americans with nutrition assistance;

WHEREAS, hunger is a problem that affects families and individuals, including children and the elderly;

WHEREAS almost half of those eligible for SNAP benefits are currently not receiving the benefits they need, and [INSERT STATE/LOCAL STATISTIC, IF POSSIBLE];

WHEREAS, each $5 in new Federal SNAP benefits generates nearly double that in economic activity;

WHEREAS, SNAP is modern, with benefits now delivered via electronic (EBT) cards;

WHEREAS, food retailers who accept SNAP EBT cards are important partners fighting hunger in our community;

WHEREAS, the United States Department of Agriculture and the State of [INSERT NAME OF STATE] are working to simplify the SNAP application process;

WHEREAS, the STATE/CITY/TOWN of [INSERT NAME] is participating in SNAP's national outreach effort by conducting an awareness effort to help constituents determine potential eligibility and inform them on how to apply;

NOW, THEREFORE, I [INSERT OFFICIAL'S NAME AND TITLE] do hereby proclaim [TIMING – DAY, WEEK, MONTH] [SPECIFIC DATE as "SNAP Awareness Day/Week/Month" and call upon the community and partner organizations to celebrate with appropriate ceremonies to acknowledge these efforts.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand on this [INSERT DAY AND MONTH, YEAR]

_____

Signature of Official

The Editorial Section

What is the editorial section?

The editorial section is the section of the paper in which the editors of the paper and others express their opinions on important issues facing the community. This section of the newspaper is typically well read by key community leaders and decision-makers who can help ensure the success of your efforts. Below are several tips for getting your messages and information on these pages. Keep in mind that the more you can tie your outreach efforts in to local happenings, the greater the likelihood of getting published.

What is a letter to the editor?

Letters to the editor are written by readers in response to an article that appeared within the past few days and submitted for publication in the newspaper. Keep on top of local news coverage around hunger, poverty, or families in need. This type of news coverage provides an opportunity for you to respond with helpful information.

What if no one contacts me about my letter to the editor?

If you have sent your letter to the editor and have not heard anything within a week, make a follow up call to check on its status. Be aware that editors receive hundreds of letters and may not immediately respond. A letter to the editor on a specific topic has a better chance of being published if more than one person or group responds. This is a good time to rally your partners and ask them to write to the paper as well; each letter, however, should be individually drafted. Form letters are usually ignored.

What is an opinion-editorial (op-ed)?

An op-ed is an article written by someone expressing their opinion about an important issue. Op-eds are submitted by community members. Editors decide which to print in the paper. Op-eds are an excellent forum to let people know about the benefits of SNAP because they allow you to share your point of view with much greater detail and persuasion than a short letter will permit.

What if no one contacts me about my op-ed?

Due to limited space, not every op-ed that is submitted can be printed. Most op-ed editors will respond to your submission within a week or two. If you have not heard back in that time frame, or if your piece is particularly time-sensitive, it is perfectly acceptable to call and ask about its status.

Tips & Tools

Tips to Write a Letter to the Editor

- Check out the newspaper's guidelines for publishing letters to the editor, usually printed on the editorial page itself.

- Begin by referring to the article to which you're responding, including its title and the date it appeared in print.

- Resist the urge to say everything you know. Keep your letter concise and make one clear point.

Tips & Tools

Tips to Get An Op-Ed Published

- Learn the rules. Research the newspapers' specific rules about submissions, such as word count, before you start writing. This information may be posted on the outlet's Web site.

- Make contact. Call the editorial page editors of the newspapers and talk to them about your column idea. They may have ideas about the direction you are taking that will increase the likelihood of being published.

- Use a hook. Include a "hook" or catchy aspect in your piece. Has there recently been a news story about hunger that would make an op-ed on SNAP timely? Perhaps there is new data on local poverty rates, or a special event coming up that will provide a hook.

- Use examples. Capture the reader's interest with illustrations, anecdotes, and personal stories. These persuasive tools help explain complicated issues and bring the human element to your op-ed.

- Stick to facts and solid arguments. Avoid alienating readers with inflammatory or accusatory remarks.

- Make a specific recommendation. State your opinion on the issue.

- Make a unique point. Offer a new point of view even if the newspaper itself editorialized recently about hunger or poverty.

- End with a bang. Summarize your argument and leave readers with information, advice, or an idea they or the community can act on, such as a challenge to increase enrollment of their neighbors and family members who are eligible.

What is an editorial board meeting?

Most newspapers have editorial boards who determine the position that the newspaper will take in its printed editorials. These representatives from the newspaper meet regularly to consider those positions. Meeting with this board as a group or with individual board members allows you to influence editorial coverage of hunger and SNAP issues. As a result of an editorial board meeting, a reporter may be assigned to cover the issue, or an editorial may appear in the paper.

Also consider joining an advisory board, county board, or nutrition board, if one exists in your community. Look to this group of individuals to present hunger and other related topics to the editorial board. There is a chance there will be no immediate outcome, but the meeting will introduce you and your partners to influential individuals at the paper, and position you as a knowledgeable source about SNAP. These are important relationships to cultivate, so follow up with new information from time to time.

Pointers to Set Up an Editorial Board Meeting With a Newspaper

- **Plan your timing.** You'll grab a few minutes of a board member's precious time in the same way that you'll get the attention of a beat reporter: a strong peg to a current news story.

- **Make an appointment.** Call the newspaper and ask who organizes editorial board meetings. In most instances, an assistant will either connect you directly to a board member or ask you to send a letter or email outlining your request. Most papers reserve regular hours for the board to meet, generally between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. The meetings are usually held in a small conference room at the newspaper's offices.

- **Assemble a team.** Rally your partners. Assemble a diverse group to meet with the editorial board, with each person having different perspectives and experiences related to SNAP benefits and hunger. Participants might include the head of a local food bank, a local grocer, and an elected official. Let the newspaper know ahead of time whom you are bringing.

- **Rehearse your presentation.** Designate one person to act as the spokesperson and introduce the issue (e.g., "Many people go hungry unnecessarily and aren't receiving the SNAP benefits they need. When people use SNAP benefits, everyone in the community wins."). Limit your remarks to 15 or 20 minutes.

- **Leave written information behind.** After the presentation, the members of the editorial board generally ask questions (see the Q&A in the Introduction Section for helpful hints). Be sure to leave written information about your organization, hunger, how SNAP benefits can help and their positive impact on your community, etc.

Purpose Of Community Calendar Listings

Newspapers, radio and TV stations, and local access/community cable TV channels often have time or space set aside for a calendar listing of public events happening in and around a city or State. This publicity is free and easy to obtain.

Most media outlets that have a calendar section assign a specific staff member — usually a calendar editor — to receive submissions and compile the listings.

Respect the media outlet's deadlines. A general rule of thumb is to submit listing information a few weeks in advance; however, it is best to contact the specific outlet to determine timing and preferences (fax, email, U.S. mail) for receiving calendar information. This is also a perfect opportunity to inquire whether or not the outlet accepts corresponding images and, if so, what the preferred format is (hard copy, JPEG, TIF) and the resolution or image size needed.

If you are submitting a calendar listing by U.S. mail, it is recommended that you send a cover letter and listing two to three weeks before the event date. Remember to put your letter on your organization's letterhead; if you are submitting an image along with your letter, be sure to include a sample caption.

A CALENDAR LISTING SHOULD CONTAIN

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- Contact name and phone number
- Cost, if any

Community Calendar Listing Template

[DATE]

Dear Community Calendar Editor,

Too many low-income individuals and families in [NAME OF STATE/CITY/TOWN] are not getting the food they need. In fact, [X NUMBER] low-income people in our community are at risk for hunger and poor nutrition, and many of these are children. Studies indicate that, nationally, about 50 percent of those eligible for SNAP benefits are not getting the benefits they need. Here in [NAME OF STATE/CITY/TOWN], [INSERT STATE/LOCAL STATISTIC, IF POSSIBLE].

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the cornerstone of the Federal nutrition assistance safety net. Today, the program provides more than 8.2 million households and 21 million low-income Americans with nutrition assistance.

To increase enrollment at the [STATE/LOCAL] level, [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] has embarked on a major outreach effort to help low-income individuals and families learn about their eligibility for SNAP benefits and how to apply. On [DATE AND TIME], [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] will be [EVENT INFORMATION DETAILS] at [LOCATION].

Please include the following notice in your community calendar listing. If you have any questions about our program, please contact me at [PHONE NUMBER].

Thank you.

[CONTACT NAME]
[NAME OF ORGANIZATION]